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HOPEFUL HOSTILITY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN NATURALISM

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ABSTRACT

American Naturalism has a reputation of being a reductive and often times violent genre, but in its brutality exists a lens to examine adverse social conditions and practices of modern and historical society. Evolved from its precursor in European Naturalism, American Naturalism would undergo adaptations to make the genre more relevant to the American audience, authors like Frank Norris and Stephen Crane each tailoring their naturalistic novels to cater to their respective times. Since then, the genre has gone as a style that is as difficult to define as it is to accept, American Naturalism receiving criticisms and detractions with each novel written. Nevertheless, the genre has endured and only further adapted with America's constantly changing social climate.

To assess and examine the adaptations in American Naturalism, texts written long-after American Naturalism's inception were analyzed through Valerie Smith's theory of intersectionality. Rather than focusing on one particular aspect of a text, Smith's intersectionality examines multiple components in a subject and examines not only their individual roles but their relationship with one another as well. The novels

chosen, Ann Petry's *The Street* (1941) and Max Brooks' *World War Z* (2006), are first qualified as American Naturalistic texts by way of genre hallmarks before Smith's theory is applied to show not only how the hallmarks contribute to the novels individually, but how those same identifiers have evolved over time. This thesis focuses primarily on the evolutions in American Naturalism's narratological method and its expansion of the naturalistic conclusion.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In his essay “Authority (White), Power, and the (Black) Critic: It’s All Greek to Me”, literary critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. lobbies for the establishment of a mode of criticism unique to black literature. This call for a specialized form of critical method is couched, however, in a deeper advocacy for the continual refinement of those methods as well. For Gates, merely knowing and repeating the already-established methods is not enough. Once learned, the methods, in this case those of literary criticism, must be constantly adapted and altered so that they can continue to properly distinguish and identify specific features found in literature. Understanding of a body of work, according to Gates, is attained when the method is adapted to the literature, not when it is placed in an already existing matrix (86). Many of these matrices of critical language are mentioned by Gates in his essay, among them structuralism, humanism, new historicism, and Feminism. Although it is not mentioned by Gates, this paper will argue American Naturalism as one of the critical discourses to undergo the adaptations advocated by Gates in his text. Drawing on methodologies presented in Valerie Smith’s study of convergence and multiplicity in meaning, this paper will examine Ann Petry’s *The Street*

and Max Brooks' *World War Z* in order to demonstrate American Naturalism's adaptations to other literary genres while also analyzing the significances of those adaptations both in and beyond the literary presentation. By going beyond the traditional confinements of American Naturalism, these adaptations, the same as those promoted by Gates, will make evident the advantages of a multifaceted critical approach to literary criticism and analysis.

CHAPTER II

A NEW ANIMAL

While American literary naturalism maintained elements such as the limited hero and the soulless opposition commonly referred to as “force”, it would undergo changes that would distinguish it from its French precursor. Pizer, in *20th Century American Literary Naturalism*, is quick to point out that American naturalism is both an adaptation and an interpretation of a European style of writing (10)¹. Where the European form of naturalism sought to keep a scientifically methodical approach to writing, often times resulting in literature situated in historically significant instances (rise of the bourgeoisie, etc.), American literary naturalism had to be written to suit its country’s rapidly changing socio-economic and political climates. Thusly, it became largely allegorical, taking on a cyclical form where its characters would begin in one instance and make a journey only to return to a place strikingly similar to the one where they began (Pizer 10). For Pizer, this repetition is accented by the character’s limited gain of knowledge or awareness with respects to their experience, an element that many naturalist authors establish does not guide or instruct. Though doing this “darkening of experience” indirectly champions persistence, it firstly cites the fundamental limitations placed on mankind’s freedom,

limitations that are unfailingly brutal as they are uncontrollable. In spite of this, American naturalism does not accept the idea that these limitations strip the naturalistic character of value, it celebrates mankind's drive to understand and control as well suffer pain and defeat (Pizer 11). This established what critic Oscar Carroll refers to as American naturalism tendency of "pessimistic determinism" (Rahv 61). This state of being, developed from the European form of naturalism, presented a journey for the naturalistic character that brought about degeneration of humanity offset by traditional naturalistic elements. The outcome was a literary style that placed mankind in a situation where it stood virtually no chance of surviving in the clear-cut sense. This manifestation of naturalism, so far removed from the lofty ideals and concepts of romanticism, quickly gained a foothold in American literature, particularly during the 1930's during adverse times like those in the Great Depression (Pizer 15). However, it was also this American form of naturalism that came under heavy criticism.

Though American naturalism gained popularity by highlighting the potentiality for existence as a bleak and violent process, many in the literary world would assail American naturalism for its reductive approach. In his essay "Notes on the Decline of Naturalism," American literary critic Philip Rahv discusses what he deems to be the most striking criticisms against American naturalism under the pervading theme of "the reduction of man." Rahv himself states that naturalism has the tendency to "treat things too flatly," an opinion shared by many younger authors who utilize reality as a component of their works, not the substance (59). In another vein, older, more-traditional authors see the presence of American naturalism as a "spiritual loss" in literature and that its approach is a far cry from the lofty ideals and limitless potential found in other literary

styles like romanticism (Rahv 45). American naturalism represented what Rahv referred to as “an invasion of art by science.” This invasion eradicated the beautiful deception that romanticism championed and made literature, as Rahv put it, “ugly.” (48). This “ugliness” is made possible not only through the reductive treatment of the novel but in the limited description of the American naturalistic novel’s events. Adapting scientific method, these events are related to a largely exterior world and observe its characters as “groups” rather than “individuals (Rahv 74). Furthermore, this limited investigation of events and individuals is often times presented to the reader as something that comes without historical precedence. Without a clearly indicated historical setting (The Great Depression, The Civil Rights Era, etc.), American naturalism had become a style that was difficult to include for study in the classroom. Nevertheless, daunting criticisms like these would not be enough to push American naturalism out of the literary arsenal. In some respects, they seem to have only strengthened its utilization and presence as a style.

CHAPTER III

THE TEXTS

To not advance the European form of naturalism would make the genre irrelevant for future readers. According to American naturalism and realism authority Richard Lehan, keeping the traditional European form would make naturalism “incomplete” for future readers (Lehan 27). In that, staying true to the traditional style would be condemning naturalism to a state of irrelevance. Such a view would limit American literature as well as be incorrect, especially when all the convergences between cultures, races, classes, and genders that occur in society are considered. It is this very concept of “convergence” that warrants and necessitates the evolutions found in the protean naturalistic genre. In the preface to her 1998 anthology *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender*, Princeton professor Valerie Smith examines the indirect marginalization of black women in the literary canon. Rather than analyzing a given subject (film/media reporting/literature/etc.) from one point of view, Smith posits that a negotiation between multiple contributing factors is essential to fully understand a given body of work in its most complete context (xvi). For Smith, the utilization of one uniform model simultaneously undermines the subject of investigation as much as it defines it. Instead,

she argues for a multi-perspective analytical method, one she refers to as “intersectionality” to fully investigate a subject (xiv).

Rather than read a text from an entirely gender-based point of view or race-point of view, a reading situated in respects to both bears a greater possibility for a more complete examination of the text. Akin to Gates’ call to reconsider the fixed nature of literary criticism, Smith’s method of “intersectionality” urges critics and readers to consider another if not multiple points of view when reading a text rather than fully subscribing to an already-established one. Though Gates’ rationale behind this is partially driven by the desire for cultural distinction, both the methods of Gates and Smith advocate an analysis of culture as well as all other mechanisms at work in a given text. This method of intersectionality, when affixed to naturalism, highlights not only the evolutions that the genre has made but the significance of those evolutions as well. These naturalistic evolutions, which can be found in literature that may not be initially categorized as examples of American naturalism, are indicative of the ever-changing, highly-adaptable literary style.

To best demonstrate how much American naturalism has evolved since its inception, novels from different genres from different periods must be examined and closely read to pinpoint where American naturalistic tradition ends and the evolutions begin. As it was stated before, American naturalism’s protean form can be found even in texts that may not be initially categorized as “naturalistic,” making Ann Petry’s *The Street* and Max Brooks’ *World War Z* candidates worthy of the naturalistic-evolutionary exploration. Written in 1946, Ann Petry’s *The Street* tells the story of young single black mother, Lutie Johnson, struggling to raise her son in 1904’s Harlem, New York. Working

day and night in jobs that embitter and harden her spirit, Lutie finds herself taking residence with her son on a street that is home to people and elements that seem primed to devour the hopes that Lutie has of a better life for her and her son. This perilous world of the street serves as a hunting ground for characters that have made homes for themselves in the desperate environment and in some fashion, have all set their sights on Lutie. Throughout the story, Lutie toils to keep both her and her son out of the street's numerous traps, but tragedy would strike when her son, Bub, falls victim to another's plot to take revenge on Lutie for a love unrequited. Frantic, Lutie agrees to a meeting with people who she thinks can help her procure the money to get Bub out of the legal system only to discover that she was approached for sexual favors in exchange for money. Boiling with frustration, hurt, fear, and frustration, Lutie explodes into a violent rage, bludgeoning an assailant to death only to realize that she has now worsened her situation as well as her son's. She recognizes how futile her situation has become and painfully concludes that the best thing for her and her son at this point is for her to be away from him. She boards a train to Chicago on a cold windy night before leaving the misery of the street behind her. Similar, grim revelations are at work in Max Brooks' *World War Z*, a 2006 follow-up to his *Zombie Survival Guide* written three years prior. *World War Z* tells the story of not one but several survivors in a world post-zombie apocalypse. With no explanation as to how it began or what caused the outbreak, readers are led through the horrific accounts of an invasion launched by the re-animated dead. Graphic accounts of encounters with the flesh-eating dead and the collapse of social order line the interview-styled novel, the accounts given from individuals from various walks of life from all over the world. Dangers (undead and living) are endured as the survivors slowly begin to

rebuild the world they once knew, conscious that the threat of their necrotic assailants
could very possibly return.

CHAPTER IV

QUALIFICATION OF NEW TEXTS AS TRADITIONALLY AMERICAN NATURALISTIC

Pioneer of American Naturalism Frank Norris defined American naturalism as a balance between realism and romanticism, differing from its contributing genres by its emphasis on what he referred to as “the low.” For Norris and other naturalistic authors of the late nineteenth century, their genre was identified by material and method rather than philosophical coherence (Pizer 36). In *Realism & Naturalism in 19th Century American Literature* (1966) Donald Pizer pares down Norris’ definition of American naturalism to a style that is “an extension of realism.” (11) This definition places the socio-scientific component of naturalistic literature at the forefront, reducing the artistic element in the definition. Pizer instead highlights the aspect of naturalism’s focus on causal forces such as heredity, environment, and instinct over individual desires and morals. However, 40 years later, Richard Lehan would restore the artistic element of Norris’ definition and combine it with the socio-biological-gear definition of Pizer’s. Despite having criticisms regarding the current state of American naturalism, Lehan’s definition places equal emphasis on both the elements of causal conditions as well as romanticized

representations of reality. For Lehan, these two definitions manifest in respective styles of naturalism but still operate off of the “dual-hinged” definition that merges art and science. Ultimately, it seems as though American naturalism still goes without a concrete definition that all parties can agree on. American naturalist critic Charles C. Walcutt refers to the enigmatic style as “a beast of protean slipperiness,” and when looking at the lack of cohesion of the definitions of American naturalism over time, such a moniker would seem to be fitting. In spite of all the discrepancy and disagreement, there exist three components that stand as the hallmarks of American naturalistic literature. Ghent University literary professor Pieter Borghart identifies these three indicators as “positivist materialism” (philosophical), “scientific experiment” (science), and the “aesthetics of realistic imitation” (art) (Borghart 211). Borghart’s indicators are found in literary devices that can be found throughout the American naturalistic canon. These devices include a narrative style that focuses on the external, the presence of a hostile environment, and the agents of the environment that impact the thoughts and actions of a typically-disadvantaged protagonist. The novel itself represents Borghart’s art component, while the interaction between the disadvantaged protagonist and the environment’s agents combine his philosophical and scientific components.

Subsequently, all three can be found in both *The Street* and *World War Z*.

In “Naturalism and the Realms of the Text: The Problem Restated” Richard Lehan suggests that the original form of naturalism utilized in European fiction situated novels between “causality” and “environment.” In this respect, the initial form of naturalism drew its shape from an external world and its physical laws. American naturalism, however, focused on a constructed reality that replaced “physical reality” for

“constructed reality” (Lehan 15). For Lehan, this “created” world cancels out the world beyond the text. This structuralist form of naturalism replaces the historical significance of the text with an emphasis on allegory (17). This practice reverses naturalism’s tradition of relating text to historical reality into relating the text to the critic’s assumptions. While this Americanized form of naturalism still uses many similar ingredients found in its European, the departure from actual history into a created history, for Lehan, almost renders American naturalism as almost completely un-naturalistic (20). Despite this criticism, Lehan views these new interpretations—far-removed from traditional naturalism as they may be, as inevitable.

CHAPTER V

“THE ECOLOGY IN RUINS”: THE AMERICAN NATURALISTIC SETTING

American naturalism paints for the reader a picture of a world that focuses on the physical by exerting physical force. These environments are driven by “possession” and “acquisition,” dividing the cast between “have” and “have not.” An environment centered on largely external devices puts its tenants under pressure, making the environment a “force” that destroys all that do not abide by its ways. A setting as desperate as this creates a world under constant stress, making the naturalistic environment an ecology in ruins as it is never of benefit and steadily worsening. This same force that compels the parties of “have” and “have not” to place all the more importance upon that which can be immediately held (material possession). In this respect, all three of Borghart’s indicators of naturalism are present in the idea of externality. This places an emphasis, not only the physical environment, but the characters as well under the “force” of the environment itself. Ann Petry’s *The Street* features this external force in the establishment of 116th street in Harlem circa 1940. The opening passage of Petry’s novel goes so far as to personify the street itself, characterizing even the harsh winter wind that rips through the barren streets, blowing trash and garbage about with the snow (Petry 2). The story’s

protagonist, Lutie Johnson, is described as being taunted by this same vicious wind as she walks the streets in the cold winter, the wind blurring her vision and obscuring the text of a sign appearing to offer vacancy that actually reads there is none. Though winter ultimately passes and the snow melts, the abysmal conditions change with the seasons as the summer brings an oppressive heat that Petry illustrates as oppressive and maddening, creating a hostile and violent world that Petry defines as one that its residence are disturbingly accustomed to (203). For Lutie, the world of 116th street is one of malice and predation, walled in and marked off by derelict buildings that house all the evils the street cannot make room for.

The idea of the oppressive environment is utilized in Max Brooks' *World War Z*, as well. Once the hordes of the re-animated dead lay siege to modernized cities across the world, society and its social infrastructure quickly falls to the wayside. Not only are law and order torn apart, but the monuments and testaments to technological advancement are decimated as well. Brooks' world, massively more expansive than the microcosmic 116th street in Harlem in Petry's *The Street*, is one of abandoned, monolithic cityscapes and shantytowns erected on the outskirts of once-great metropolises across the globe. Even the arteries to these metropolitan havens are reduced to scrap yards of abandoned, burned-out, and corpse-filled cars (Brooks 177). These deserted settings serve as hubs to the hordes of zombies, referred to collectively as "Zack" in the novel, who stalk the cities and its neighboring rural areas in packs, searching for victims. Like Petry's character Lutie Johnson, the surviving cast of *World War Z* is under the constant threat of assault from the zombies that now exist alongside them. Moreover, like Lutie Johnson, the surviving cast, under the stress of a world bereft of resources and safety, are forced into

positions that demand they re-prioritize their values. Things such as “shelter” and “food” take precedence over things like “hope” and even “goodwill.” As one of Brooks’ characters details in the interview-styled prose, kindness became a commodity that became too expensive for anyone to afford (125). Emphasis on the maintenance and preservation of the immediate, physical self becomes paramount in the environments of both novels, an excerpt from *The Street* capturing the desperation of both naturalistic settings: “No one could live on a street like this and stay decent. It would get them sooner or later, for it sucked the humanity out of people- slowly, surely, inevitably” (Petry 229).

In *The Street* and *World War Z*, Petry and Brooks paint for their readers environments that appear to be devoid of compassion or mercy for any of the characters they house. The emphasis of the hostile environment’s presence as “the force” is visible in both novels’ environments in the utilization of wreckage and debris, creating a world that does not entirely devour but does feed upon all things in its charge². These wreckages stand as reminders of not only the fate of deviation from what is necessary, but as reminders of the heartlessness of the worlds in which the characters live. The uncompromising nature of the naturalistic environment does not play favorites but does favor those who are willing to forcefully “take” from others, again, “take” being relative to physical, tangible possession. Externality here is relative then to not only the “force” exerted by a physical world, but also to the objectification of the cast (i.e. the relegation to entirely corporeal “things”). The physical, external being becomes the device for seizure or the object to be seized. Be the aim sexual and monetary as it is in *The Street* or for sustenance as it is in *World War Z*, the intentions are only facilitated and furthered by the environment but not directly enacted by it. The environment is just that, a location

and an atmosphere that has no immediate physical capability. Instead, it compels its agents to carry out or be carried out by its bidding.

CHAPTER VI

INSTRUMENTS OF DESTRUCTION: AGENTS OF THE AMERICAN NATURALISTIC ENVIRONMENT

Because the American naturalistic environment is little more than a backdrop, it must depend on its agents to perpetuate its harsh climate. The environment creates a mood, a setting that furthers aggressive, predatory behavior over that which is passive and timid. In such conditions, those who have acknowledged and embraced the role of hunters in the naturalistic environment stand as agents of the environment itself. This is not to say that they deliberately work together to perpetuate and carry out the environment's mores and values, but each does embody those mores and values in accordance to the setting created by the environment³. Ann Petry's *The Street* and Max Brooks' *World War Z* feature the same traditional, American naturalistic device in the agents that embody the interest/ values of the hostile environment, dividing the cast into not only halves but sometimes, multiple opposing parties.

The Street presents its readers with an environment whose predatory qualities are initially established through vivid description of external qualities such as the street's appearance and harsh weather conditions. Keeping a work of fiction grounded in reality,

however, demands that an environment not be personified too greatly to the extent that it becomes fantastical. To continue the presence of the hostility of her environment, Petry employs living manifestations of the environment's hostility. These agents, true to the American naturalistic form, take their shape in two primary forms in *The Street*: upper-class white society and the black citizens of 116th street. The novel's heroine, Lutie Johnson, finds herself up against and trapped beneath the perceptions of both. Socially-imposed class differences aside, both sides share the objectification of Lutie, placing the bulk of their perceptions on the signification of her physical being. This focus not only highlights American naturalism's propensity toward "the external," it simultaneously demonstrates how the agents of the naturalistic environment manifest that environment's aims. For instance, the upper-class white society, embodied by the Chandler family who Lutie worked for as a nanny and housekeeper, the environment's agents personify its force of gender-housed racism. When the parents of the Chandler family come for a visit, they are quick to formulate postulations and opinions on Lutie based on both her gender and her race. Because she is young and attractive, the elderly women of the family fix to Lutie predispositions of sexual insatiability and a dangerous appetite for the affections (and finances) of white men (Petry 45). Such a less-than-flattering view is mirrored by the cast of 116th street, an assembly that is largely black but spans the social-economical gamut between "poverty" and "middle-class" social standings.

Smith's method of intersectionality examines this emphasis on Lutie's external being from numerous lenses, among them "gender," "race," and "socio-economic standing." These three points of view are then focused through a single lens that fixes itself on the objectified being of Lutie: the eyes of the surrounding cast in the novel.

Similar to the sexualized point of view of their white social counterparts, the citizens of 116th streets' view is rooted in Lutie's corporeal being. Again, this echoes of American naturalism's inclination toward the external, but amplifies the genre's device of "agents of an incapable environment" through the cast in the story. At the bottom of 116th street's social (and moral) ladder resides Jones, otherwise known as "Super," the lecherous and calculating superintendent of Lutie's building. From their first encounter, Super desperately wants Lutie, Petry's description of his longings closer to "ocular rape" than "lustful staring." His appetite for Lutie takes physical shape during a late-night attack as Lutie returns home from a night out. He attempts to grab her and drag her to the boiler room for what are presumably the most sinister reasons (Petry 308). Thankfully, the attack is thwarted by Mrs. Hedges, a nemesis of Jones' but an agent of the environment just the same. Like Jones, she desires Lutie's body as well, but not for herself. On 116th street, Mrs. Hedges is a madam, and her stable of young girls stand as her chief source of income. In her eyes, Lutie Johnson is a prime candidate for employment in her harem. Unlike Jones, though, Mrs. Hedges uses cunning and guile to attain what she wants, not brute force. Through manipulation of Lutie's misfortunes of financial woe and social imposition, Mrs. Hedges presents herself as a friend and guide to Lutie (Petry 311). In this light, the environment's mores are seen as able to adapt their "force" beyond that of the coercive, extending its values into "manipulation" as well as "exploitation." Applied to *The Street*, the agents are all primed on the ideas of "possession" and "acquisition."

Given the socio-economic polarity between the two casts, a common ground shared between them is "material possession," making the mutual focal point ideal for both a work of fiction as well as a nod to American naturalistic tradition. In terms of the

Chandler family, their possessions are the object of Lutie's desire and will be acquired through her body. This same model is inverted when shifted to Lutie and the inhabitants of 116th street in that her body is the possession to be acquired. The means the cast choose to go about acquiring her body vary, but their objectives remain the same: take Lutie Johnson into possession. By itself, 116th street cannot do this, so the agents get their hands dirty instead.

The instruments of destruction in *World War Z* extend beyond the reanimated dead. They are a continually hazardous threat; roaming the ruinous landscape in packs, searching for living flesh to consume. The carnivorous necrotic horde is not only ravenous and relentless in their appetite, but because they are the dead-returned-to-life, they are not susceptible to the same perils humans are. This is frighteningly evident early on in the novel when the zombie legions first descend upon a major city. A soldier narrates the battle, beginning with a detailed description of all the state of the art weaponry and armor they are carrying. Soldier Todd Wainio remarks at how all the semblance of heavy artillery and cutting-edge weapons was largely cosmetic, present for the press to marvel at and show to the public as "humanity's effort to halt the zombie invasion." A rundown of the high-end weaponry, complete with its effects on a living human body ensues, followed by a phrase that sums up its importance in relation to the zombie horde: "Do you know what a Silver Bullet, an armor-piercing, depleted-uranium dart is going to do to a group of walking corpses? Nothing!" (Brooks 99) In spite of all the degeneration undergone by the reanimated dead and the technological advancement of the human cast, the primitive, devolved zombies proved the dominant force in the initial engagements. Invulnerable to the complex weapons, the undead legions swarm

major cities across the globe and reduce entire civilizations to rubble. What they left in their wake would be only be wreckages of their former greatness, and that includes the humans that survived.

The reanimated zombies that ravage the globe in *World War Z* provide a dangerous agent for the hostile environment in that they are beyond reason and obey only their most primal instincts. This sets them apart from their reasonable, compassionate human counterparts in the novel, but only in the beginning. The humans that were fortunate enough to survive being eaten alive or infected with the zombie virus were forced to live in a world of depleted resources. As the testimony of soldier Todd Wainio implies, the world at this point had become drastically advanced, so much to the fact that some could argue that its inhabitants became spoiled and lax by all their development. The introduction of an underdeveloped and primal force in the zombies would expose the collective indolence of modern society and feed upon it ruthlessly. However, the human survivors that escaped the zombie hordes quickly found themselves in a world where traits such as “kindness” and “compassion” were commodities that they could not afford. As Jesika Hendriks describes, the comfort lifestyles that survivors once knew was evident in the things they brought with them, “videogames” and “electronics” taking priority over items that would prolong survival (Brooks 123). This underdeveloped sense of priority gave way to a rapid depletion of what food was left, and over time, surviving neighbors began to turn on one another. Hendriks goes on to say:

But after the first month, when the food started running out, and the days got colder and darker, people started turning mean. There were no communal fires, no more cookouts or singing... Things got dangerous, you'd see a lot of fights. I saw

two women wrestling over a fur coat, tore it right down the middle. I saw one guy catching another guy trying to steal some stuff out of his car and beat his head in with a tire iron. A lot of it took place at night, scuffling and shouts. Every now and then you'd hear a gunshot, and somebody crying. (Brooks 127)

Such dire conditions result in survivor-on-survivor violence, ranging from the aggravated murders in the preceding passage to accounts of cannibalism later in the text (Brooks 129). This barbarity, displayed on both the survivor and zombie sides, is indicative of the pervading theme of the setting in *World War Z*: consumption.

Read in terms of Smith's intersectionality, *World War Z* reveals that both the survivor and the zombie cast operate as agents of the hostile environment (they are driven by the need to survive). Their survival is facilitated by consuming, taking in things that nourish and strengthen the body so that it can continue. Speaking in a scientific-biological matter, as American naturalism can do, this idea of "consumption" qualifies as one of the basest natural needs. The zombie personifies this trait ideally as "consumption" is their sole objective in the text. They are nowhere near as mentally capable as their human counterparts, but their simplicity brings a sense of priority that makes everything else "obsolete." The human survivors do this only after the zombies have destroyed everything once familiar. In this sense, the humans, prior to the invasion, serve as agents of their environment by displaying the penalty for failing to abide by the hostile environment's values. Once they embrace the dual concept of "consumption" and "necessity," the surviving humans devolve, shedding their communal behavior and "civility" for a way of living that centers entirely on the immediate concern of "individual survival." Stilted mores and values that give way to the possibility of being consumed are

discarded and replaced with practices that will extend their time in this new and dangerous world. This combination of the philosophical and scientific is a tradition in American naturalism, where in order for one to go on and not fall prey to the hostile, naturalistic environment, the lofty and idealized values must be thrown away and the essential, most-primitive values that favor “survival” maintained. American naturalist author Frank Norris himself championed the genre’s penchant for showcasing how man’s brute instinct was an integral part of social design (Gray 301). More importantly, recognizing and embracing this “inner brute” lead to individual enlightenment. As it is seen in Brooks’ *World War Z*, a relationship with this inner brute meant possibly inflicting violence on one’s neighbor. In doing so, however, the individual is spared suffering violence at the hands of their surviving neighbor or the zombies at their door. This sense of “getting in touch with the essential internal” demands practice at an individual level, and shifts focus to another cornerstone in American naturalism.

CHAPTER VII

UN-HEROIC: THE AMERICAN NATURALISTIC PROTAGONIST

Because the American naturalistic environment is a created atmosphere, there must be a character-based focal point for the reader to follow, and that focal point stands as the naturalistic protagonist. To refer to the naturalistic protagonist as a “hero” is misleading because their surrounding conditions do not always lend themselves to heroic behavior. Donald Pizer cites the genre’s tendency to place “necessity” over “responsibility” in its texts, stating how the characters involved in the naturalistic novel are on a “flight from responsibility” (11). Low socio-economic statuses as well as low levels of education tend to be among the hallmarks of the lacking American naturalistic protagonist ⁴. Both elements are at work in *The Street* as well as *World War Z*.

The Street’s Lutie Johnson is a black single mother who attempts to navigate the treacherous perils of 116th street while procuring a better life for she and her son. According to the genre, her most apparent disadvantage is her son, Bub. Provisions and resources that may be satisfactory for one must now accommodate two, illustrated in the morning bathroom scene between Lutie and Bub when a sliver of soap is left in the bottom of the sink (Petty 84). Beyond providing for her son, Lutie must also keep him

safe from the dangers of the naturalistic environment and its agents on 116th street, hazards she knows will take them both down if she slackens in her endeavor to move off of the street as fast as possible. In this capacity, Bub is one disadvantage, but there are three far greater hindrances working against Lutie's favor, those being her socio-economic class, largely imposed by her low education, her black ethnicity, and her gender. These components continually complicate Lutie's situation throughout the novel's development. Set in 1944, *The Street* takes place during a time when the racial tensions between black and white America were dangerously high. This was also a time in American history where women were not granted the same liberties as men. The combination of social climates like these can result in an individual confined to a poverty-stricken environment, a setting often times associated with high levels of violent crime. Because of her low education, Lutie is not prepared to manage the responsibilities and rigors of a job above that of nanny or house-keeper (her positions in *The Street*). Taking these into consideration, Smith's intersectionality would note that even if Lutie did receive a quality education, the combination of her race and her gender confine her to maternal and menial positions at best. In a social context, these are positions that would still be undercompensated and far from "respected" by those around her. The presence of Bub, compounded with the pre-existing "disadvantages" in Lutie's lack of education, her gender, and her race, provide for readers a protagonist who goes into a disadvantageous situation already disadvantaged. This is a slight to the conditions found in *World War Z*, where the characters began in positions of luxury and comfort but soon find themselves in a world that offers them no comfort.

Aside from having to care for her son, Bub, Lutie shares a larger commonality with the surviving humans in *World War Z* in that both share relatively low stations on the social ladder. Whereas Lutie is a housekeeper and nanny, the vast majority of the cast in *World War Z* are, for the most part, at the bottom of the ladder in their respective fields. Many of the testimonies in the novel are given by surviving civilians, but there are others who hold positions in the military, often times lower in their position (private, etc.). However, there are some who are introduced as disadvantaged well beyond merely being thrust into a world where all they had known and were familiar with was destroyed. Survivor of the zombie invasion Fernando Oliveira is a drug-addicted captive of a group of survivors based in the Amazon Rain forest in Brazil, and despite having endured the hordes of re-animated corpses that devoured and destroyed everything around him, Oliveira's disadvantage comes in that his addiction to drugs is a result of his fall from social grace due to the zombie onslaught. Prior to the invasion, Oliveira was a practicing doctor, a surgeon based in South America and doing more than well for himself. His station granted him such social favor that his first encounter with the zombies (in the form of an infected colleague) was masked by the media as a "violent robbery" even though Oliveira himself committed the murder (the zombies were relatively unknown at this point in the novel) (Brooks 27). It is this case that best illustrates the significance of the "disadvantaged naturalistic hero" in *World War Z*, as it is through Oliveira, a once-powerful character now rendered powerless, that the destructive nature of the naturalistic environment and its agents is clearly seen. The duo does not discriminate or make allowances the way a "civilized" society would do for members of a favored social tier; instead, it seeks to devour all and coerce those in its ecology to internalize its values or

fall prey to them. *The Street*'s Lutie Johnson and *World War Z*'s Richard Oliveira both embody examples of American naturalism's traditional disadvantaged hero, Lutie's disadvantage endowed by birth (hers and her son's) and Oliveira's present due to collapse of the social infrastructure. Regardless of the origin, the disadvantage is crucial in showing the devastating results of life in the American naturalistic realm. It is the unheroic protagonist's disadvantaged state that demands the release of lofty beliefs and compliance with a way of living that encourages brutality.

CHAPTER VIII

BREAKING FORM, EVOLVING PRACTICE: DIVERGENCE FROM THE AMERICAN NATURALISTIC TRADITION

The Street and *World War Z* can be viewed as examples of American naturalism through their utilization of traditional American naturalistic elements. In terms of criticism and analysis of a genre or canon, this practice of “association and repetition” is the same limited scholarship Henry Louis Gates speaks of in “Authority (White), Power, and the (Black) Critic: It’s All Greek to Me” and is, at best, a regurgitation of practices already established. The two texts in *The Street* and *World War Z* are essential so as to demonstrate how these qualify as traditionally naturalistic texts. It is through this same practice of connective analysis, coupled with Smith’s “intersectionality,” that evolutions in the genre can begin to display the permutations American naturalism has made over time.

Since its introduction into the American literary arena in the late nineteenth century, American Naturalism has continually undergone adaptations and evolutions stemming from the authors who ventured into its realm. Though the genre never enjoyed the advantage of having a hard-lined definition, it does benefit from being centered on

several key elements that allow it to be easily affixed to an already-existing genre. In that respect, coupled with the ever-changing social and cultural climes in which American naturalistic texts are written, it is inevitable that dimensions of the style be formatted to accommodate their respective societies and social matters. Smith's theory of convergence is optimal for examining of these adaptations performing a multi-angled analysis of a brutal New York City rape and assault of a female jogger to utilize mechanisms, such as racial archetypes and media bias, to uncover the dynamics of the situation. Applied to the evolutions of American naturalism, Smith's non-binary theory would provide a deeper understanding of a new alternative outcome for its protagonists.

CHAPTER IX

TO BETTER REACH THE MASSES: EVOLUTIONS IN AMERICAN NATURALISTIC NARRATIVE

Evolutions in the field of narratology have begun to incorporate areas of study that broaden the once-narrow structuralist roots of the field, roots that concentrated largely on folk tales and nineteenth century narrative fiction. According to narratological professor Roy Sommer, these evolutions have extended their focus from fiction to science, history, and psychoanalytical texts as well. Moreover, Sommer argues these roots rarely strayed from the canonized works of white male authors, limiting their range of investigation further still (Sommer 5). Sommer sees the shortcomings of this constricted practice to include geometric schematization of texts and a tendency toward the conception of universalized or essential forms (5). According to Sommer, these tendencies have begun to be expanded to greater understand not only fiction, but narrative as a cross-disciplinary practice. As a multifaceted approach, the enhanced study of narratology stands as a critical metalanguage that requires specialized discourse in aspects such as narrative unreliability and culture coding (Sommer 6). This is a departure from the structuralist origin of the practice and a venture into a more theoretical

framework and paves the way for an analytical method applicable to narratives of all kinds beyond fiction. This transforms the once stream-lined and exclusive study of narratology into one more broad and inclusive in its approach. This new form now pays attention to once-unconsidered dimensions such as “public reception” and “cultural relevance” of the text, taking on traits not unlike those of Smith’s theories of convergence and “intersectionality.”

As it has been already stated, the narratological convention in American Naturalism emphasizes on the external, the corporeal and tangible elements of existence as its subject matter of choice. Critics such as Rahv and Lehan have noted American Naturalism’s inclination toward the external predisposes it to a minimalistic description of its subject matter. Rahv’s accusations of “reductive treatment of humanity” and Lehan’s criticism of American Naturalism’s penchant for substituting a created reality for historic specificity can both be found in the narrative style in Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* ⁵. *Maggie* is told not from one perspective, but three, including an observation of Maggie, her brother Jimmie, and their mother. True to American Naturalism’s form, the depth of the narrative is limited to a “cause and effect” with thin explanation as to the particulars of a given event. Borghart’s observations of American Naturalism’s narrative practices center on a concentration on “the general” or “the collective,” ideas that are facets of “externality.” The professor goes on to note American Naturalism’s practice of zero-focalization, a method that allows for nearly unlimited use of external and internal narratorial comment (Borghart 221). The external and internal approaches serve to reveal the characters’ inner workings while simultaneously separating the narrator from the events in the text, creating an objective read that leaves

the reader to decide/ judge the narrated events for themselves (Borghart 223). This scope, limited and shallow as it has been criticized to be, is a hallmark of American naturalism that undergoes a massive expansion in the narratives of *The Street* and *World War Z*.

Though the narrative tradition of American Naturalism kept its focus on a small character roster set within a naturalistic environment, newer models of naturalistic narrative have taken on a more panoramic approach. This is seen in the novels *The Street* and *World War Z*, texts that are not traditionally categorized as “American naturalism” but bear the previously established earmarks of the genre. Both novels feature the traditional protagonist; a lower-classed individual placed in an uncompromising and hostile setting, but with the added feature of multiple points of view beyond their own. *The Street* places Lutie Johnson as its protagonist and her story is at the forefront of the novel. However, Lutie’s story is one situated, juxtaposed and impacted by numerous other characters in *The Street*. Characters such as Super, Mrs. Hedges, Min, Boots Smith, and her own son Bub all have their own accounts that ultimately influence that of Lutie’s. Such a narrative style deemphasizes the importance of the protagonist, contributing to the reductive quality of American naturalism that its critics harp upon. However, this reduced emphasis, while taking away from the individual, highlights the naturalistic community as a whole and illustrates their dynamic as a collective. This same mechanism is at work in Max Brooks’ *World War Z*, where the communal aspect increased from one city street to a global scale, the community taking shape in the form of those who have survived the zombie onslaught. Like Petry, Brooks employs the use of the panoramic narration, using multiple individuals’ accounts and stories to illustrate the disparity of their living conditions in their now-naturalistic environment. The panoramic narrative

takes another step forward from Petry's in that it is inclusive of not only multiple characters, but multiple characters from vastly different backgrounds as well. Where *The Street*'s expansive narrative approach involved primarily black Americans of a low socio-economical standing, *World War Z*'s global backdrop allows for points of view influenced not only by socio-economic standing, but ethno-cultural elements as well. These multiple points of narration found in contemporary American naturalistic texts reveal not only how much a literary style can evolve, but the significance those reality-based, contributing socio-cultural factors can have on literature.

Applied to American Naturalism, Sommer's revamped version of narratology, combined with Smith's intersectionality, takes the facets of reception and cultural climates and combines them. Sommer's essay reveals the enhanced and broadened approach to narratology takes into consideration more elements beyond just what is being said on the page. Components such as critical reception and existing cultural climates during the novel's release among the new parameters are examined to fully analyze the impact of narrative. These new parameters exceed the narrow, structuralist approach of the early narratologists who focused largely on 19th century narratives written by white men, and sought new avenues of investigation to better assess what was being said in a given text's narrative (Sommer 5). By situating their novels in climates emulating significant points in America's history, Petry and Brooks primed their respective novels for largely positive critical reception. Ann Petry's *The Street*, released in 1946, was met with favorable reception. This was attributed to Petry's social criticism, outlining why America fails the Black Woman and Man, and according to Stanford University professor W. Lawrence Hogue, "because the first half of the 20th century favored naturalism"

(502). Released sixty years later, Max Brooks' *World War Z* is released to similarly positive criticism, among them author Ronnie Curry Jr. who noted the novel's effective practice of touching on the somber notes of the human condition from an international point of view. The critical success of both these texts rests in their commentary on and relevance to the cultures of their respective releases. Whereas *The Street* highlighted socio-economic disparities and racial tensions between Black and White America circa the 1940s, *World War Z* frames its text in a setting not unlike those found in the 21st century. Set as a tale with global proportions, the most immediate culturally significant element is that of widespread and virulent disease. The novel features an unknown virus that, once transmitted, transforms the host into necrotic cannibal, devoid of logic or reasoning capability. While the virus itself is fictitious, the characters' reactions to the virus are not unlike those found in the present day. The 21st century has seen its share of highly-contagious and lethal viruses such as H1N1 and the Avian Flu, and the real-world responses of panic and fear are emulated in the novel. More importantly, however, is the setting of the global community after the initial zombie horde has struck as it is not unlike that of a community after a terrorist attack. The despair, fear, and paranoia intermingled with pride are strikingly similar to the setting of the post-9/11 United States of America. With respects to this condition, the success of Brooks' novel can be attributed to the same if not similar reasons for Petry's success as stated by Hogue: the time mirrored a Naturalistic environment.

Smith's intersectionality notes the relevance between reality and created reality, seeking to "understand the dynamics and relations" between the two rather than placing importance on one over the other (xvi). Coupled with writing from multiple points of

view, this conversion of points of view with fictitious events set in historically-true settings provide readers a greater chance for identification with their texts. Placing their stories in generalized cultural eras rather than those specific further enhances these multiple perspectives. Doing so increases the capacity for the reader to not only identify but empathize with the novel's events, resulting in greater positive reception. In this sense, the "flat" and "ugly" multi-tiered approach favored by American Naturalism becomes advantageous, not only increasing literary popularity and cultural relevance of its texts, but also the connectivity between the text and reader.

The multiple perspectives in the narrative also grant a greater capacity for empathetic connection with the text. Sommer's observations on the developed practice of narratology and their application to the naturalistic texts in *The Street* and *World War Z* demonstrate the impacts of the genre's narrative evolution. By situating their events in eras not exclusive to but distinctively American, Petry and Brooks are able to make their respective novels accessible to the populous at large. Doing so removes the texts from what Smith refers to as the "application of a uniform model that undermines as it defines" (xviii). This separates these contemporary texts from other, more-traditional American naturalistic texts that focused on the male and or/white population of the country. While *The Street* emphasizes the disparities imposed upon the black community, it also featured the vantage point of a single mother, one who is from a low economic standing at that, taking the text's accessibility beyond the bounds of "black fiction" and into that of "women's fiction" as well. *World War Z* features the same expansive approach, increasing its scope by taking on vantage points that were not just those of surviving Americans but other ethnicities around the globe. This multifaceted narrative method

allows for connections, more specifically, empathy, on multiple planes from more than just one audience.

The empathetic-connective component is a particular interest of Amy Coplan, author of “Empathetic Engagement with Narrative Fictions.” In it, she discusses the ever-evolving study of the relationship between readers of narrative fiction and its characters. A topic long-hindered by ambiguous concepts such as “identification” and “empathy,” Coplan argues that while those are important ingredients of the narrative, they are just that: ingredients. She goes on to explore numerous angles in the study, concentrating her focus on the cognitive and emotional fields, hinging on the idea of the reader feeling what a protagonist may be feeling while maintaining a separate sense of self (Coplan 144). In doing so, Coplan posits that the reader is able to (if done properly) not only feel and perceive a narrative’s events as the protagonist does, but still observe those same events from their own unique perspective cultivated by their own feelings, thoughts, and experiences (149). This approach allows for an ideal “shared experience,” one that is made all the more possible when the narrative’s lens is distributed among several different characters rather than just one.

American naturalism’s usage of multiple points of view in tandem with historically non-specific setting makes Coplan’s “shared experience” more likely to occur for the reader by way of evolved narrative. Those who were not born in a time already-passed (i.e. *The Street*) maybe allowed to relate to the proceedings in Lutie Johnson’s tale by empathizing with her role as a single mother. Readers who may not be familiar with the post-terrorist-attack conditions in *World War Z* may be lost to the full plight of that particular element of the book, but maybe able to better identify with the component of

virulent disease and the social panic it can cause. American naturalism's narrative evolutions, "reductive" and "generalizing" as they may be for some, have widened the reading lens and allow for a wider audience to receive and connect with the text. Moreover, these two novels in specific share an even greater overlying theme, one that readers may be able to identify with easier than with anything social, cultural, or gender-based. Survival, of social and racial pressures in *The Street* and of cannibalistic, feral zombies and marauding human survivors in *World War Z*, stands as the predominant element in the novels. It not only keeps alive the naturalistic hallmark of the hostile uncompromising environment as stated by Pizer, but its evolution accents the use of violence. This brings to light the violent depths civilized human beings are capable of in order to survive, depths that traditional American naturalist authors sought to showcase. In the American naturalistic environment, the tradition dictates that one conform to violence in order to survive; the evolutions, however, call for conformity not to appease the environment, but the self.

CHAPTER X

DELIBERATE, DERANGED, DETERMINED: THE NEW NATURALISTIC

CONCLUSION

Where traditional American naturalism features two possible outcomes for its protagonists, the evolved form features a third. This new option stands as a bridge between the protagonist and the hostile environment and its mores, a bridge built on violence. The traditional American naturalistic environment was one of stark contrasts sustained by violence, establishing a climate conducive to “destruction” or “survival” for the protagonist. This same climate rejects any individual wants for the maintenance of the “destruction” or “survival” paradigm for the protagonist, ensuring the continuance of the environment’s culture⁶. A process as violently deconstructive as this is as unforgiving and brutal as the environments that use it. Like the narrative used to tell these naturalistic stories, this violent process would evolve as well. Instead of destroying or assimilating the protagonist, the evolved form of violence found *The Street* and *World War Z*’s American naturalism take their respective protagonists and mold them into a nemesis for the environment, capable of the same terrible violence but employed on their own terms.

Before analyzing the evolution of the process or its significance in the text, the presence of violence in American naturalism's literature must be explained. In a literary sense, violence is a tool; while it stands as the divider between the agent and the protagonist in the naturalistic novel, it is also the manifestation of Norris' "force." According to literary theorist and cultural analyst John Fraser's book *Violence in the Arts*, violence is a tool of confrontation with the truth (42). A product of overload and deprivation, Fraser defines violence as a mechanism designed to make readers uncomfortable by confronting a condition or state that was previously unknown or not carefully thought about (48). This is typically achieved by polarizing the cast of characters in a given work of fiction, two parties that Fraser refers to as the "violation" and the "victim." These two opposing sides stand as ideal models for the analysis of the violence component in a naturalistic context in relation to *The Street* and *World War Z*, attaching to both factions parameters and motivations that expand on those already established by American naturalistic tradition.

Fixed to the American naturalistic dichotomy, the agents of the hostile environment qualify as "violators." As the very embodiments of violence, the violators are the facilitators of uncomplicated action driven by uncomplicated reasons (Fraser 54). Their presence, according to Fraser, operates as a means to understand the natures and attitudes of real-life violators. If the reader is able to empathize with the violator, then the violator's presence in narrative fiction allows for the opportunity for readers to learn how deal with their existence (Fraser 84). This empathetic quality is not unlike that of Coplan's concept of the empathetic reader, where the reader is able to identify with a fictitious character yet still maintain their sense of self. In Fraser's violator model, this

trait of “potential empathy” is distributed between two subdivisions: “the deliberate” and “the deranged.” Where Fraser defines “the deliberate” as “professionally monstrous,” calculating and methodical in their approach, he defines “the deranged” as something less-developed and in essence, more primal (92). The key difference separating the two camps resides in their social viability; where one is a functioning member of society that demands respect, the other is a model of minimal psychological and social effectiveness.

These categories, when applied to *The Street* and *World War Z*, find themselves interspersed between both novels.

Deliberate violence, between both black and white, is the tool of choice in *The Street*. Typical of the reality though limited in their presence, the white cast, portrayed by the Chandler family, utilizes social stigma and stereotypes to limit their black counterparts. On a larger scale, Petry’s novel is set in a time where legislative and political power was held only by whites, as noted in this internal monologue of Lutie’s: “Streets like the one she lived on were no accident. They were the north’s lynch mobs, she thought bitterly; the method the big cities used to keep negroes in their place” (Petry 323). This level of deliberate and calculated manipulation is found in the black cast as well. Although reduced in its scale, its employ can be found in characters such as Boots Smith who methodically approach their objective (Lutie Johnson) with a patient approach, waiting and studying Lutie to better manipulate her for their own respective sexual reasons. In the same community, they are offset by the superintendent of Lutie’s building, Jones. An antagonist of a base caliber, Jones is characterized as being of limited intelligence and is initially seen to be driven solely by the sexual possession of Lutie.

However, once his advances are rejected, his qualification of “deranged” shifts to

“deliberate” as he concocts an intricate plan to incriminate Lutie’s son, Bub, displaying an internal interchangeability between the two classifications. Such an option is not found in *World War Z*, where the violator cast is primarily “deranged.” Beyond the limited cognitive abilities of the zombies whose sole purpose is to consume living flesh, the survivors of the zombie apocalypse exhibit similar decreased intelligence as they begin to turn on one another when rations run low. Starving and afraid, they attack one another verbally and physically, going so far as to cannibalize one another solely to survive (Brooks 124). Though visibly more intelligent than their reanimated counterparts in the zombie, the initial surviving cast readily qualifies for classification in “the deranged” category. However, the drives and functions of neither “the deliberate” nor “the deranged” violator groups would count for anything had they no one to prey upon. Without “the victim,” the endeavors of “the violator” would be without meaning.

“The victim” is the second component in Fraser’s model of violence. As a literary device, Fraser cites the “the victim” as the embodiment of ethnographic and/ or nationalistic trouble. In other words, the fictitious victim in a work of fiction serves as an emotional barometer for instances that cannot be easily deciphered or explained (59). In this light, they are the objects of suffering, the “other” in a world where they are the minority. Isolated from the social majority, they are made to endure violence and hardship to further depict the contrast between “normal” life and the life in the world in which they are currently placed. Placed in terms of traditional American naturalism, the protagonist, who doubles as “the other,” endures this violence only to be consumed or enlightened by it. While *The Street* was initially categorized as American naturalistic, *World War Z* was not although it exhibits the same placement of an alien other into a

hostile and violent world. *The Street*'s protagonist, Lutie Johnson, a single-mother with dreams of a better life for her and her son, is forced to live in an environment where dreams are destroyed and reality tears away at the hopes and efforts of those in its walls. In *World War Z*, the protagonists placed in peril are the humans who survive the zombie onslaught and are forced to live in the remnants of what used to be their civilized world. Both novels are imbued with traits of traditional American naturalism as well as Faser's model of "the victim." Simultaneously, this is where the evolution in the American naturalistic novel takes place. The polarized options of "destruction" or "enlightenment" by way of the hostile environment are increased by one: the option to adopt the mores of the naturalistic environment to meet one's individual desires.

By adopting the American naturalistic culture but using the practice of violence to meet their own needs, the protagonists in *The Street* and *World War Z* break the traditional paradigm of American naturalism. Instead of being broken by the hostile conditions or realizing their place in its ecology, the protagonists in these novels evolve the practice and create a new option: conforming violently to the rules of the genre while maintaining one's self-interest. This new option embodies critic Oscar Carroll's idea of pessimistic determinism that situates the protagonist in dire surroundings that sadden and frustrate while also inspiring to overcome (Rahv 61). Both novels do feature characters that do assimilate the naturalistic convention of "adaptation or annihilation." Mrs. Hedges, a black woman in *The Street*, learns of the inequalities she must face as being both black and a woman, a physically unattractive one at that. In spite of this, she flourishes, solidifying herself as a madam on the street with a stable of beautiful young girls in her charge. Petry describes Mrs. Hedges as a woman imbued with all the qualities

of a predator when Lutie first meets Mrs. Hedges: “It was the woman’s eyes. They were as still and as mmalignant as the eyes of a snake. She could see them quiet plainly—flat eyes that stared at her—wandering over her body, inspecting and appraising her from head to foot.” (6) Though she herself does not pursue love or lofty dreams like Lutie, Mrs. Hedges does prosper by conforming to the carnal culture found on 116th street. As the head of her own harem, Mrs. Hedges makes her money by working with the reality in which she lives, unlike Lutie Johnson who is constantly battered by it. A similar yet less-successful conformity can be found in *World War Z*’s “quislings,” surviving humans who undergo what can best be described as a zombie-apocalypse form of Stockholm Syndrome. Still living, these surviving humans roam the wastelands of the society they once knew, groaning and shambling about as the actual zombies do. However, this conformity is short-lived as once they are confronted with the real zombies, they are devoured. In this sense, their “adoption” of the hostile world’s mores is disingenuous and base, resulting in their ultimate destruction by the environment’s agents in the zombie. Survivor Joe Muhammad describes this as a result of some survivors’ inability to cope with the “fight-or-die” mentality present in the zombie-infested world, a mental surrender that ultimately promises destruction. He describes early reports of zombie in-fighting, which was really zombies eating quislings: “Stupid. It was zombies attacking quislings, but you never would have known that to look at it. Quislings don’t scream. They just lie there, not even trying to fight, writhing in that slow, robotic way, eaten alive by the very creatures they’re trying to be.” (Brooks 159) The main protagonists of both novels, however, would not succumb to their surroundings and go one step further than Mrs.

Hedges or the Quislings; they would use the naturalistic environment's culture against itself and achieve their own goals.

By manipulating the American naturalistic environment's culture to suit their own needs, protagonists Lutie Johnson and the survivors of the zombie apocalypse enact a revolt against the dominant culture. Refusing to be broken or comply with the violent practices of the traditional naturalistic setting, Lutie and the survivors resist the path of extremes by utilizing the violent method without internalizing the primal motivations the environment champions. In advancing the practices of the traditional American naturalistic protagonist, Lutie Johnson and the survivors are still abiding by Norris's "enlightenment by way of embracing the brute" (Gray 301). In that, the literal practice of "embracing the brute" takes on the intention of "engaging the agent."

In both novels, Smith's intersectionality takes its form in pitting the protagonist against not just the hostile naturalistic environment, but what its agents represent. A collision takes place, but instead of conforming or being destroyed, the protagonist is educated in violence and shown how to realize their ideals. A sudden revolution ensues and the environment is confronted by a reborn protagonist now determined where they were once afraid. The revolt in *The Street* does not occur until the end of the book. With her son in danger of being convicted of tampering with mail, Lutie Johnson needs to raise the money to get him a lawyer to defend his case. Her job does not pay her enough and she is forced to meet up with Boots Smith, a local musician and henchman to local vicelord, Junto. Boots tells her he knows someone who can give her the money to hire a lawyer, but upon arriving to his apartment, Lutie discovers that she is to earn the money as Junto's private whore. Insulted by both the proposition and his own attempt to take her

by force, Lutie verbally assaults Boots. Refusing to be disrespected by a woman, Boots slaps Lutie across the face (Petry 429). It is then when Lutie recalls all the stress the street has brought to her up until that point. The lecherous stares of men on the street, Jones invading her living space as well as trying to rape her, Mrs. Hedges propositioning Lutie to become a girl in her harem, and now physical violence for refusing to be a whore pushed her to the breaking point. Enraged, she grabs a nearby iron candlestick and viciously attacks Boots, bludgeoning him to death so brutally that his face is described as a mass of dark red once she stops (Petry 430). She rifles through his pockets before leaving his apartment, stealing the \$200 needed to pay Bub's lawyer when she realizes that by killing Boots, she has made things all the more difficult for her son's case. She reflects on the events that have just transpired, knowing the state would now see her as unfit to raise Bub. It is upon realizing this that she concludes that he is better off without her and left in the care of the state (Petry 435). She agonizes over the promise she made to see him the following day, hoping he knows that she would always love him even though she must flee the city. In the care of the state, he would have a chance, something she laments not being able to give him as she admits that her best was not good enough (Petry 435). If this is the case, then Boots Smith's propositioning of Lutie to be a private whore to Junto is affirmation of the fact, making her murder of Boots a symbolic destruction of socially-imposed paradigms.

Lutie's rebellion is a multi-tiered assault on the numerous stereotypes assigned to black women. Throughout *The Street*, Lutie Johnson is subjected to numerous stereotypes and prejudices forced upon women of any nationality, many of them centering on the sexual objectification of their being. In the case of Lutie, however, there is an added

dimension in that she is a woman and black, a state of being discussed in Jennifer Putzi's "Raising the Stigma: Black Womanhood and the Marked Body in Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces*." The professor of English and women's studies concentrates her essay on the characterization in Pauline Hopkins' novel *Contending Forces* but raises points found in Ann Petry's *The Street*. According to Putzi, Hopkins' portrayal of her black female characters illustrates the subjectivity of black women brought on by physical and sexual violence. She is categorized as an object of public labor, be it view or use (Putzi 4). Should the black women attempt to defy her placement, she is punished on both physical and psychological planes, mutilation and humiliation being the punitive measures of choice. She endures this brutality by both white men and white women, whose cruelty stems from envy rather than social misconduct. In spite of such cruelty, the black female characters in *Contending Forces* carry on, their resiliency warranting only more cruelty from their slave masters by refusing to be broken by the harsh treatment (Putzi 7). The scars she bears serve as physical identifiers of her sub-humanity as well as her sub-femininity, painting her as a second-class citizen and more importantly, vulnerable without the protection of a man. If Putzi's findings in *Contending Forces* are indicative of this perception as an actual social construct, then Lutie's murder of Boots, who embodies those same reductive views, is symbolic of Petry's criticism of the construct. Employing a literary style such as American naturalism would allow for an environment that would permit predatory behavior like those found in *The Street*, but abiding by American naturalism's traditional model (protagonist destroyed or enlightened to placement in the environment) would keep Lutie in her victimized, second-class citizen state.

By advancing the paradigm of American naturalism while still keeping true to its roots by using violence, Petry is able to criticize another social construct in motherhood. Subscribing to violence allows Lutie to break free from the environment while achieving her ultimate goal of a better life for her son. As another example of the evolved American naturalistic slant on the book's finale, Lutie makes the conscious decision to leave Bub in the care of the state. On the surface and by naturalistic confines, this is a casting off of a burden and for some, a demonstration of naturalism's reductive view of the institution of motherhood. Ideally, the model mother would, contextualized to *The Street*, take her son and flee the city. In not doing this, Lutie could be seen as the model "bad mother." Observed through Smith's intersectional lens and combined with the evolved American naturalistic form, however, her leaving Bub becomes an act of sacrifice rather than lightening one's burden. As Petry writes, "He'll be better off without you. That way he may have some kind of chance. He didn't have the ghost of a chance on that street. The best you could give him wasn't good enough" (435). This excerpt shows that Lutie is aware of her new social status: a single black mother in a racist and sexist society who has violated the society's law. Keeping Bub would confine him in a world not unlike the street she sought to escape. Given this situation, leaving him under the care of the state is the solution most conducive to his well-being. A total victory (i.e. better life for her son and herself) would not be possible in the American naturalistic environment due to the environment's negative impact on all in its presence. However, as Lutie has shown, employing the environment's culture can result in the attainment of one's desires as well as liberation from the environment. This evolution in American naturalism, advanced from the traditional model, gives way to show not only the flaws of social institutions like

sexism and racism, but the pressures they exert to those they seek to suppress. The new American naturalistic texts offset these pressures by showing the means those oppressed people will take to free themselves of oppression. As Putzi remarks in her text, the black woman is unique in that she is a figure who persists and in doing so, suffers for the sake of others (14). While this level of sacrifice could be affixed to any woman with “mother”

status, this same suffering, placed in the violent setting of American naturalism, conditions the character to endure violence while simultaneously teaching how to effectively communicate with those conditions. Set in an American naturalistic context, this takes Fraser’s “the victim” model and metamorphoses it into “the victimizer,” building the potential for “the victim” to be neither broken nor assimilated but conditioned to revolt. In *The Street*, this revolt is done on the individual scale. In *World War Z*, the deconstruction of social paradigms is done on a more communal level.

Paired with Fraser’s polarized model of violence, Smith’s intersectionality examines different social institutions in *World War Z*. Where racism and sexism are targeted in *The Street*, the cultures of consumerism and materialism are criticized in *World War Z*. When the zombie invasion first takes place, humanity’s response was awe blended with moderate concern. While the idea of the walking dead is far-fetched, society places its faith in its highly advanced technology and weaponry to dispose of the reanimated dead. This confidence quickly crumbles into panic and disarray as the weapons designed to destroy living flesh do nothing to the zombie legions as they swarmed entire cities, consuming the living and spreading their plague wherever they roamed. Forced to flee the cities that have become little more than feeding grounds for the ravening dead, human survivors flee and take shelter in rural shantytowns, bringing

with them things their present day has deemed “necessary” (electronics, videogames, etc.). Initially hospitable toward one another, the survivors, under the duress of encroaching zombie horde, turn on one another once resources deplete. Under such dire conditions, violence breaks out as humans turn on one another in the sake of survival, going so far as to cannibalize one another for sustenance. Were their existence to be polarized here between hostile survivors and zombie, then the cast of *World War Z* would fall in line directly with the traditional American naturalistic model. Instead, they ascend it, adopting the brutal side of the environment’s culture by uniting together as survivors and fighting back against the zombies and reclaim their world. In doing so, they begin to reconstruct their destroyed society, enlightened by casting off the values that once held them back and empowered by the new values they have discovered (communality on a global scale). Joe Muhammad, a survivor of the Zombie War, shares this in the text:

I’m not going to say the war was a good thing. I’m not that much of a sick fuck, but you’ve got to admit that it did bring people together. My parents never stopped talking about how much they missed the sense of community back Pakistan. They never talked to their American neighbors, never invited them over, barely knew their names unless it was to complain about loud music or a barking dog. Can’t say that’s the kind of world we live in now. And it’s not just the neighborhood, or even the country. Anywhere around the world, anyone you talk to, all of us have this powerful shared experience...I know I come off as a little too optimistic, because I’m sure that as soon as things really back to ‘normal,’ once our kids or grandkids grow up in a peaceful and comfortable world, they’ll probably go right back to being as selfish and narrow-minded and generally shitty

to one another as we were. But then again, can what we all went through really just go away? (Brooks 336).

This testimonial is but one of many that highlight the newfound sense of community shared across the globe as well as hinting at older values left behind.

Like Ann Petry in *The Street*, Brooks criticizes social institutions through his characters' thoughts and actions to suggest where the faults lie. Where Petry's targets were "racism," "sexism" and "economic disparity," Brooks chooses "consumerism" and "materialism" instead. The earlier and middle portions of *World War Z* include testimonials from the characters that hinge upon notions of over-confidence due to the vastness of their material possession over their zombie counterparts. Furthermore, that same materialistic mindset, strengthened by mention of the funding they once coveted needed to attain those materials, is painted as largely responsible for the desperation the characters exhibit as the zombie's occupation goes on. Professor emeritus Colin Campbell writes in his essay "What's Wrong with Consumerism?: An Assessment of Modern Criticisms" that the many detractions established against consumerism are flawed and overly-generalized. While some of his criticisms (not debunking) of several concepts are supported by the events in *World War Z*, many of his claims are countered and proven otherwise. His argument on "materialism not replacing friendship or love" is overridden by the accounts of violence inflicted on fellow survivors for both food and utilities (Campbell 285). This state of selfishness, which Campbell defines as not of social detriment, does in fact take precedence over values such as "citizenship" and "community" in Brooks' text (290). While he concludes that analysis of the criticisms require more inclusive research, he does not take into count the surrounding severity of a

given society nor that it is always stable. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina showcased many instances of consumerism and materialism gone berserk with people looting and stealing not just for food, but the possessions of others. These were offset by reports of people killing one another with intentions of protecting their property from marauding civilians. In this very real example, the survivors of the hurricane, like the survivors of *World War Z*, make the transition of “victim-into-victimizer” in a fashion similar to that of *The Street*.

Whereas *The Street* featured agents that embodied the social institutions that Petry sought to criticize, *World War Z*'s agents do the opposite. As hostile and violent as they are, human survivors are the object of criticism when held under the evolved American naturalistic perspective. Though living together in the same world community, the survivors quickly fragment once their world is assaulted, so much to the fact that they turn on one another in the name of self-preservation. The zombies, however, do not lose their integrity (unconscious it may be) and maintain their collective practice for the duration of the novel. This is showcased by Brooks by way of character testimonials that tell of a lone G (slang for “zombie”) spotting a victim, giving chase, and moaning to signal others, sometimes from miles away, to join in the feeding (Brooks 279). Though the deliberateness of this act is questionable, there is no denying that in their purpose, the zombies are united and their prey is not. Armed with the most technologically advanced weapons found, the splintered human survivors live in constant fear of being seized until they realize they need to work together. Here, the values of consumerism and materialism are not abandoned as they would have been intended up in a more traditional text, but they are given less priority. The technology that survives the zombie onslaught is tailored

to combat the zombies but is done in a manner that places the greatest importance on the strength of numbers and fighting in unison. Again, as it takes place in *The Street*, the deconstruction of social values deemed undesirable (by the author) is accomplished by evolving Fraser's construct of "the victim" into "the victimizer." Were the traditional model of American naturalism to take place in *World War Z*, the surviving humans would go on murdering and cannibalizing one another while avoiding being eaten by the zombies. By recognizing the importance of uniting their broken masses and mounting a cohesive front against their assailants, they rebuild a society absent of the divisive values they once held dear. Through violence, the victimizer is able to achieve the realization of their goals, goals that the traditional model of American naturalism would have smashed.

The evolution of American naturalism's outcomes in "victim-into-victimizer" embodies Smith's intersectionality by establishing a medium between naturalism's possible conclusions. The once polarized outcomes in traditional American naturalism mirror Fraser's model of violence in essence and are balanced by conjoining them between one another. Both Petry and Brooks present characters placed in traditionally naturalistic settings that undergo traditionally naturalistic events. However, they forego the traditionally naturalistic conclusion by adopting the environment's values only to the extent that doing so helps to fulfill their individual wants, the same wants the traditional naturalistic setting destroys. In this they become a medium between the individual and the environment, adding third dimensions to both the American naturalistic model as well as Fraser's. In fact, the "...into victimizer" is slightly misleading because the victim is not becoming a victimizer themselves; Lutie does not become a predatory character like that of Boots Smith or Mrs. Hedges and the human survivors do not become cannibalistic

drones like the zombies. Instead, the protagonists in both models are victimized and become empowered by accepting the culture around them that dictates, as Norris has stated, “force prevails.” Full subscription to the American naturalistic tradition stops when the protagonists chooses to maintain their. Smith’s intersectionality demonstrates the outcome of such a collision, where what is vital is maintained and strengthened and what is inessential and of detriment is cast aside. Characters like Boots Smith and the zombies represent the absence of humanity, the rejection of compassion, choice, or hope by completely adopting the desperate conditions found in the American naturalistic novel. Lutie and the survivors hold on to these, and while their grip on their humanity may slacken, the conclusion shows them holding on with the vise-like grip. Advancing the traditional form allows for authors to not only address or criticize multiple social conditions of a given time, but show that they can be overcome by understanding the depths of those conditions as well. The protagonists lash out at the representative of the malignant constructs, and as Petry describes Lutie’s assault on Boots, strike back “through waves of anger in which he represented all these things and [...] destroy them” (430).

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

While its initial form may have showcased a bleak and hopeless side of human existence, the evolved form of American naturalism reveals developments in its literary mechanics. Placing the under the inclusive critical lens of Smith's intersectionality reveals the genre's progression, emphasizing its literary advancements in its multi-layered narrative and adding the self-interested conclusion to the devices already in place. Ann Petry's *The Street* and Max Brooks' *World War Z* share the cornerstone traits with their traditional forebears in their usage of the hostile environment, agents that abide by the environment's mores, and a disadvantaged protagonist. While keeping the traditional form, they stand apart in that unlike their precursors, their outcomes feature the protagonists gaining some measure of self-fulfillment by partly internalizing the culture of the hostile environment. In this, Smith's theory of intersectionality reveals that in the two examples of evolved American naturalism, there exists one distinct quality: where traditional American naturalism sought to smash them, evolved American naturalism shows that hope and humanity can survive. It will come at the cost of violence, but

should the naturalistic protagonist be willing to stain their hands with the blood of the agents, they can survive the environment and realize their innermost desires as well.

In both novels, this realization takes murder; brutal and animalistic engagement of the agents in the most sadistic fashion that leaves the protagonists resembling their naturalistic foils in the agents. This is crucial though as American naturalistic literature is a genre of collision, typically where the larger environment prevails over the individual protagonist. This tradition is absent in the new model and with its absence, the collision is emblematic of how socially negative values, the same as those discussed and represented in *The Street* and *World War Z*, must be dealt with. Through Smith's critical lens, taking into count multiple perspectives, literary devices, and socio-cultural values, the texts of Petry and Brooks become instructional manuals on how to dismantle the malignant social values of their days. In the spirit of ideological American rebellion, the direct and hostile engagement of a direct and hostile force is essential if the condition is to change. The alternative to doing so is to keep the present form, and in terms of American naturalism that means to stay true to the "comply or die" model where individual wants are smashed by the social environment. For the genre to not evolve would confine it to its traditional, nihilistic tone. More importantly, it would fail to acknowledge the constantly-changing social conditions in which its texts would be set. American naturalism would become a box, a category that would simply contain and identify but never advance. It would, quite literally, go the way of Alexander Crummel in Gates' "Authority (White), Power, and the (Black) Critic: It's All Greek to Me."⁷ The genre would continue to not acknowledge of the human will to resist, struggle, and overcome. Instead of showcasing the virtues of the human will, American naturalism would go on to forever

show humanity as a powerless entity in the world, always at the mercy of the surrounding environment. Juxtaposed with times of social unrest like those of the Civil Rights Era, American naturalism would appear to become an outdated and irrelevant genre were it not to evolve. Criticized as it may be, this refined form of American naturalism succeeds where its precursor did not in emphasizing the disparity found in American society while also showing that those disparities can be overcome. For American naturalism to not change and not acknowledge the human capacity to rebel and change would be to do as Crummel did in his pursuits: reject a piece of his identity for the sake of recognition.

NOTES

¹ Appearing nearly 30 years after its French precursor's inception, American naturalism quickly set itself apart from other bodies of literature through its treatment of the novel as a whole. French author Emile Zola, considered by many to be one of the most notable of the naturalist authors, pioneered a literary style that sought to turn the author into a scientist rather than a shaper of fantasy. Donald Pizer, a professor of English at Tulane University and leading authority in American naturalism, cites Zola as the prime influence for American naturalistic authors such as Frank Norris and Stephen Crane. Since the late nineteenth century, American naturalism is known for its protean form.

Pizer's book, *20th Century American Literary Naturalism*, plots what American naturalism is by stating exactly what it is not: a continuation of the ideals of the agrarian society and a literary style that perpetuated fanciful and idyllic portrayals of characters and situations (5). According to Pizer, Zola and those like him approached literature from a scientific standpoint; placing real-world limitations on their characters such as economic status and education to shape the world around them. These limitations are augmented by setting the story in an environment that is hostile and/or oppressive, symbolizing a "force" that opposes the naturalistic character and all they seek to achieve (8). In short, American naturalistic literature bound its characters in worlds where they are at the mercy of the environment, keeping Zola's idea of fiction being truthful rather than polite or ennobling as romanticism had previously done in the literary world (Pizer 8).

² American naturalist author Stephen Crane utilizes the same naturalistic device of the gargantuan, uncompromising "force" in his novel *The Red Badge of Courage*. Written in 1895, the novel tells the story of Henry Fleming, a young man who enlists into the military with romanticized notions of war and combat. Those notions are shattered once he engages in battle and is forced to face the real horrors of war in the dead and wounded that surround him. These terrors reveal the significance of what must be done in war and he sheds his ideals, going on to become a hero at the novel's end by realizing his role in the world around him. Though the force in *The Red Badge of Courage* is "war," the "forces" present in *The Street* and *World War Z* are just as unsympathetic and reductive of the characters.

³ More traditional American naturalistic novels, such as Frank Norris' *The Octopus*, features this as a point of focus in the genre. Written in 1901, *The Octopus* tells the story of a California wheat farming community's troubles with an enclosing railway company. In the story, there exist not one but two "forces" or "environmental, external conditions" that continually pressure the cast of characters. Because those conditions (the wheat and

the railroad) are without the capacity to function and act independently, they rely on agents to act on their behalf. In the case of the American naturalistic classic *The Octopus*, those agents are the wheat farmers and the railway corporation, both sides colliding time and time again throughout the story, due largely in part to their conflicts of interest (force).

⁴ Such stark conditions can be found in the American naturalist classic *Sister Carrie*. Written in 1900 by Theodore Dreiser, the novel tells the tale of 18-year-old Caroline Meeber and her venture from rural Wisconsin into the bustling city of Chicago. With limited education and unfamiliar to the cunning and conniving practices found in the city, Caroline finds herself constantly on the receiving end of the hardship. She must take jobs that bring her shame and unhappiness solely because of external reasons such as rent and bills. This necessity, highlighted by Pizer and *seen in Sister Carrie*, is made possible by the dire conditions surrounding them in a given novel, placing the naturalistic protagonist in a disadvantaged position against the duo of the naturalistic environment and its agents.

⁵ Written in 1893, *Maggie* is one of the earliest examples of American Naturalism. It tells the tale of a young girl in lower Manhattan and her family as she enters young adulthood only to spiral out of control under the pressures of her neighborhood. The chain of events begins for her with her venture into love and arrival into disillusionment, resulting in her death.

⁶ According to Norris, the environment's constant application of "force" stood as the dividing line between the naturalistic novel's cast of characters. For Pizer, this emphasis on violence is a result of the struggle for power and control in the American naturalist novel. Those who have assimilated to the naturalistic environment's culture, seek to maintain power while the weak strive to attain it for themselves, wrestling with the consequences of their emotions all the while (Pizer 14). This "romance of the commonplace," as Pizer called it, is synonymous with Norris' claim that humankind's brute instinct, suppressed as it may be in modern society, is still an integral part of the social design (301). For both, the inclusion of violence is not to dehumanize the human cast but to highlight new social values by violently dismantling the old ones (Pizer 31).

⁷ At the foundation of Gates' argument is the example of Alexander Crummel, a 19th century pan-Africanist who sought to dismantle the social perception of black Americans as "sub-human beings." Crummel deduced that proving his humanity meant articulating it in such a way that his "superiors" would have no choice but to acknowledge the fact. He then set about to master the English language, but in doing so, according to Gates, came to abhor any other language spoken but proper English. In this sense, Crummel, through education, looked down upon the English spoken by black Americans (black vernacular) as a bastardization and subsequently inferior language. As a result, Gates' findings place

Crummel in the same position as those who held the opinion of blacks being less intelligent than their white American counterparts.

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